

SPiRiT OF THE PRESS.

EDITORIAL OPINIONS OF THE LEADING JOURNALS UPON CURRENT TOPICS—COMPILED EVERY DAY FOR THE EVENING TELEGRAPH.

The Dangers of the Republican Party.

From the N. Y. Tribune. The result of the elections in Maine and California conveys one or two lessons which we feel satisfied from what occurred at the Massachusetts Convention, the Republican party will take to heart. The one is the danger of relying too much upon party discipline, or even the goodness of the principle on which the party is based; and the other is the danger of importing too much of the Puritan spirit into politics.

When Connecticut was lost, last spring, the local papers tried to persuade themselves that their defeat was due to their not having been ardent enough in their advocacy of negro suffrage, and proclaimed that they were going to secure victory next year by working harder for it than ever, and in this pleasing theory they received strong support from the New York Tribune. But nobody whom the horn-blowing which precedes and follows elections does not bewilder, ever took this in anything but a Pickwickian sense.

We took the liberty ourselves, at the risk of being misunderstood, of suggesting that it was not too little negro suffrage but too much which caused the disaster, and that it was the over-reliance of the party on its efficacy which gave the State to the Democrats, by causing the Republicans to pay too little attention to other things. For instance, they flattered themselves that mere shouting for equal rights would make such performances as the nomination of a professed mountebank in the third district of no consequence; and the Tribune and Independent here thought that, merely by hurrying and flinging of caps in the air, the rank and file could be made to swallow him. In like manner, in other parts of the State, the approach of the election was, with singular want of tact, selected as a fitting occasion for the enforcement of a prohibitory liquor law which had for a long time previous been allowed to lie dormant.

Now, the reason why it is not safe in most States to rely too much on the strength of the fundamental idea on which the party organization is based, is that the whole of the party is scarcely ever completely under its influence. In Connecticut, in New York, in Pennsylvania, and in New Jersey, as well as in other States, the ardent Republicans are never sufficiently numerous to win an election. They have to secure their majority by the help of a few thousand who are only lukewarm Republicans, whose political feelings are not strong, who are affected in voting by divers collateral considerations, and who, unless they are well looked after, are as likely as not to go over to the enemy on the day of battle. It is these men who decide political contests in nearly all the newly divided States. We dwell strongly on this circumstance last week in our comment on the Connecticut election, although it is something for which, amidst the roaring about "armies" and "banners" and "bivouacs" which the party papers keep up about election time, it is almost impossible to secure attention. The writer of the excellent paper on "Constitution-Making" which have been appearing in our columns, also pointed it out in his article last week, showing that this State has changed sides in politics five times in the last ten elections "by a few votes in each precinct given over from one party to the other." In 1852 these few thousand voters gave the government of the day to the Copperheads, in the very midst of the war, when the seat of the mass of the Republican party was at white heat, simply because they were somewhat disgusted with the military mismanagement and the excessive touching of Mr. Seward's "little bell."

Now, as long as the success of the party is dependent on the fidelity of these auxiliary corps, their feelings—prejudices, if you will—have to be borne in mind in the management of it. They will support you in the pursuit of your fundamental idea if you do not ask them to sacrifice too much to it. But you cannot work them up to such a pitch of enthusiasm about it as to get them to vote for a "showman" or pugilist simply because he supports it, or to wink at the total disregard of character in nominations or of purity in legislation. The Republican party, unmindful of this, has, in various directions, of late been making rather heavy drafts on their devotion. In Pennsylvania, for instance, they have been arraying themselves against a judge simply because, in the exercise of his judicial functions, he held the issue of legal-tenders by Congress to be, as a matter of law, unconstitutional—a performance which the leading party organ, the Tribune, to its great honor, had the courage to denounce. Now, there are enough Republicans in Pennsylvania who care more for judicial independence than they do for negro suffrage or the Congressional plan of reconstruction to be disgusted by an incident of this sort, and either stay at home on election day or go into the Democratic camp. We know what was done in Connecticut, and what the result was.

In California the Republican party has suffered itself for five years to be led by notorious knaves, who, while waving their hats for Congress and the black man with one hand, held the other thrust up to the elbow in the State treasury. The main body of the party are so much interested with the gravity of the contest now going on at Washington that they continue to vote for these rascals while knowing and deploring their rascality; but the main body are not able to carry the day. There is a sufficient number who would rather see the State lost to the Republicans than see the State Government in the hands of rogues, and so these go over. The new Governor of California is a War Democrat, opposed to the Congressional plan of reconstruction, but is a man of stainless honor, and one of the most devoted Republicans and anti-slavery men in the country—a man to whom the Republican party owe a man to whom Mr. Haight well, and knows the condition of California politics—has assured us that had he been in California at the last election he would have voted the Democratic ticket.

We would warn the Republican party that the number of such men of men who, while ardent friends of equal rights, and thoroughly convinced of the wisdom of the Congressional plan of reconstruction, are yet so alarmed and disgusted by the prevailing political corruption, by the shocking abuses of the nominating system, so convinced that unless we can bring more purity of character to bear on the work of politics, neither universal suffrage nor any other arrangement of the political machinery will save our system of government—is increasing, and that nothing but greater deference for their "prejudices" or "simplicity" will enable it to keep the field and finish successfully the great work which it has in hand.

The election in Maine calls attention to another somewhat unfortunate tendency in

the organization—though it is a fault not very far removed from virtue—and that is its tendency to introduce a somewhat Puritanic spirit into legislation. Those who abuse Puritanism are accustomed only to look at its bad side. We, on the other hand, it ought not to be forgotten, are accustomed only to look at its good side. We read Macaulay's splendid eulogy of it, and see its wonderful career, forgetting that it belonged to an exceptional era, and that as a permanent spirit in politics it works mischief as well as good.

By the Puritan idea we mean a feeling of impatience at sin in others, and a disposition to repress it by the strong arm. It is something more than abhorrence of sin or impatience of evil and suffering or indignation at the wrongs of others. All these feelings are universal in their nature. Puritanism is purely an outgrowth of Christianity. The ancients had no such sentiment. Socrates was not so death-hungry because he was a heretic, but "because he corrupted the youth," and thus undermined the State. The Roman sumptuary laws did not aim to control individual character, but to check that corruption which was eating out the life of the republic. But when Christ founded a religion resting on personal character—when personal purity became the great aim of life, and personal sin the one thing to be shunned—the feeling of impatience at sin in one's self was not long in passing over into impatience at sin in others, and an eager desire to rescue them from the snares of the evil one. Hence the great missionary movements of Christianity, beginning with St. Paul and worthily represented by the Augustines, Xaviers, and Brainerds who have succeeded him.

Like all other human qualities, this crowning virtue of Christianity was capable of being transformed into an evil. It is an easy step from a genuine Christian sympathy with others, and a desire to aid them, to a feeling that we have a right—nay, are under an obligation—to force our aid upon them, and reform them even against their will. If our neighbor does not see that he is committing a sin, is not that all the more a reason for preventing his involuntary wickedness? This impatience at the sin of others, and haste to deal with it as if it were one's own, is the essence of Puritanism. But it is not confined to the Puritans; nor is it peculiar to Protestantism. It inspired the Directors of the Inquisition as well as the Covenanters of the Scottish and the "Saints" of Cromwell's army. Whenever people are intelligent, thoughtful, and earnest, this spirit will spring up spontaneously among them, to give scope to the intensity of their convictions and the warmth of their zeal. Strength of conviction is in great danger of passing into intolerance. For all people act not from mixed motives, and it is not always possible to distinguish this spurious sentiment from the genuine Christian principle from which it springs. The sense of pain at the misconduct of others, and of indignation at the wrongs suffered by others, are wholly legitimate and praiseworthy feelings. We have a right to prevent others from suffering from violence or fraud; these are matters which concern us all. But when our aim ceases to be the redress of wrongs, and we begin to legislate for the prevention of personal sin, we pass from the sphere of politics into that of morals; that is, bring human laws to bear upon actions which, in their personal nature, concern nobody but the individual man and his Maker—setting up our human judgment as the arbiter of right and wrong.

At the present moment the Republican party is in great danger of suffering itself to be controlled by the Puritanic instinct in making up great measures of those intelligent but not broadly educated classes who have very positive convictions and very earnest purposes, but who have not learned to appreciate and respect the rights of human thought. More than this, in the stormy times through which we have just passed, the uncompromising zeal of the Puritan element has been of the most signal service. Now, the situation is changed. We have passed from the revolutionary stage to that of constructing, and we need above all things calmness, moderation, and a regard for the rights of all. The English race seems especially disposed to Puritanism; the Germans recognize individual rights more readily than we. The German population in this country was with difficulty won over from the party which promised least interference with their individual liberty. They consented to postpone this to the more weighty issue of universal freedom. Now that this question is settled, they will surely drift back to their old associations if the Republican party is controlled by the Puritanic idea.

Puritanism has had a noble history and has accomplished marvellous results. It is through and through heroic and self-sacrificing, even when it has wandered furthest from the path of law and liberty. Its career in the future may be as glorious as in the past if it will free itself from its bad tendencies, will learn that liberty of thought is as sacred as emancipation of the body, and that legal restraints should have nothing to do with moral acts. It is hardly necessary that we should make the application of all this to the attempts which are being made in Massachusetts and Maine to enforce by law a standard of private morals for which, no matter how high it may be, the community is evidently not prepared.

Mexico.

From the N. Y. Tribune. For the first time in fifty years Mexico is at peace. Since 1816, in 1821, declared the country independent, and made good the claim, its history is one of unintermitted civil war. President succeeded President, Dictator followed Dictator; the success of any chieftain created a dozen rivals, and the Government was no sooner set up by one faction than it was pulled down by another. The victor banished or executed the conquered, only to find himself in a short time the victim of his own revengeful policy. No administration was safe from revolt; no leader dared trust his comrades; the army was now the instrument of Guerrero, now of Santa Anna, now of Bustamante. Quiet there was none for the country; it was either at war, or preparing for war, and the only periods during which internal strife was suspended were those of the Spanish invasion, and the aggression of the United States. The condition of the nation was, indeed, desperate when it could only be saved from ruin by itself by the necessity of repelling its foes, and when the advance of a foreign army was the only hope of union and peace at home. The causes of this perpetual strife are evident. Mexico had never succeeded in reconciling her different races; the people were united for self-government, and assumed all the dangers of a Republic without the ability to secure its blessing. The country was burdened with an ambitious clergy, or, if not, the soldier did not begin a revolution, his neglect was remedied by the priest. Nature, too, had done her share in fitting the country for the theatre of continual war; in that superb climate armies were easily raised, and if money was needed the inexhaustible silver mines supplied it. Thus wars which would have ruined greater nations were borne by the Mexicans with comparative ease, and their evil was not so much the exhaustion of the country as the paralysis of its enterprise and

the absolute suspension of its progress. The condition of Mexico could hardly have been worse in 1861, when, while the Administration of Juarez was struggling to maintain itself, the European alliance was consummated, and that long war begun with France which has ended in the triumph of the republic.

Mexico had sought training in this perpetual war, and probably the French invasion will mark the beginning of a new and brighter era. The Mexicans owed the usurpation of Maximilian to their own quarrels, and may profit by the bloody lesson. A people who fought as the Liberals fought, who prized so dearly their independence, and sacrificed so much to maintain it, cannot be incapable of self-government. Radical as their faults may be, their virtues are no longer to be questioned. The execution of Maximilian was a proof of weakness, yet it must be admitted that there was cause for retaliation. It was a cruel ending to a cruel war. But with the late Emperor died all the hopes of Europe of Europe may have had of establishing their rule upon American soil, the Austrian fleet which will carry back to his own land the body of Maximilian will bear with it another corpse, and in the vaults of St. Stephen the vast ambition of Napoleon, side by side with his victim, will share the darkness of his sleep. Mexico, by the proof she has given of her strength, has secured long peace with her alien foes; her leaders have but to unite in repressing domestic faction to make their republic only second to our own: it is in their power to renew the ruinous struggles of the past, or to build enduring peace in the future. The task is hard; the character of a nation is not changed by a war; but it must not be forgotten that this war has swept away many evils, and that, as we have rid ourselves of slavery, Mexico has annihilated the political power of the Church.

Difficult as it is to understand the Mexican situation, and impossible to discern the intentions of the leading generals, it is clear, we think, that the war has united certain factions, and inspired the nation with a higher patriotism. With the death of Maximilian the passion for revenge seems appeased. The trials at Queretaro have not ended in the execution of the prisoners; Escobar, Casanova, Salm-Salm, and the rest have been sentenced to imprisonment. General Castillo, who had been condemned to death, has been pardoned. It is probable that the execution of the imperialists are ended. In this moderation we rejoice, and it is equally encouraging to find that many of the reports of Mexican unity to the United States had no better foundation than the invention of the foes of the republic. Escobedo has formally denied the calumny that he was in favor of the exclusion of foreigners from the country, and we take his letter as proof that no influential party in Mexico aims to prevent peaceful immigration and friendly relations with other States. General Diaz, it is said, has united with Juarez in the effort to unite the country. It is true that there still are divisions of the Liberals, and the elements that threaten Juarez, but the execution of the imperialists are ended. In this moderation we rejoice, and it is equally encouraging to find that many of the reports of Mexican unity to the United States had no better foundation than the invention of the foes of the republic. Escobedo has formally denied the calumny that he was in favor of the exclusion of foreigners from the country, and we take his letter as proof that no influential party in Mexico aims to prevent peaceful immigration and friendly relations with other States. 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